

Key Indicators of Progress Toward Postsecondary Reform: Revised Six-Year Graduation Rate Definition

Action: The staff recommends that the council approve a revised definition for the Key Indicators six-year graduation rate.

The staff proposes changing the Key Indicator six-year graduation rate definition to match the definition used by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System for its Graduation Rate Survey. IPEDS, a federal program administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, provides a nationwide standard for defining graduation rates. Currently, variations in the way the graduation cohorts are defined for Key Indicators and the GRS yield slightly different results.

The current Key Indicators graduation rate includes fall first-time, full-time freshmen enrolled as baccalaureate or undecided students, first-time freshmen who enroll for the first time in the summer and as full-time students at the same institution in the following fall semester, and first-time sophomores who earned college credit before graduation from high school. The graduation rate is the percentage of students who earn a bachelor's degree at the same institution by the fall semester six years later. Two changes are necessary to align this definition with the GRS definition:

- Include students who enroll as first-time students during the summer and as full-time students in the fall, regardless of whether they attend the same institution during their first summer and fall terms.
- Allow for exclusions. IPEDS allows institutions to exclude a student from the graduation cohort if the student is deceased or leaves school for military or foreign aid service or to serve on an official church mission.

Incorporating these changes will not result in markedly different six-year graduation rates (the variation between the 2002 Key Indicators and GRS rates was generally less than one percentage point at Kentucky's public universities), but will help avoid reporting of inconsistent results for this important measure and will facilitate national and regional comparisons.